

## Buddhism - Learn It. Live It.

*Bhikkhu Professor Dhammavihari*

Thoughts are the basis of our life activities. It is primarily in this sense that the Dhammapada begins its admonitions, saying ' *Mano-pubbaṅgamā dhammā mano-seṭṭhā mano-mayā*. It is very fortunate indeed that we are now used to begin the day, listening to good thoughts, deriving them from our primary source of inspiration, namely our religion, and that is, for most of us in Sri Lanka, Buddhism. But thoughts are not to be left idly in our minds like grain in a barn. Thoughts must be daily turned into a living phenomenon, translating them into action.

It is religiously inspired words and deeds that we need in our daily lives. That is why in our Buddhist Religious Way of Life which is the Noble Eightfold Path, we are constantly reminded to possess, at the very outset, a Corrected Vision in the Buddhist Way or *sammā ditṭhi*. It is defined as ' having adopted the Buddhist way of thinking ' or *āgato imaṃ saddhammam*. This Corrected Vision is invariably followed by Corrected Thoughts or *sammā saṅkappa*.

Thereafter, we are assured that our activities of our day-to-day life in the world - like words, deeds and modes of making a living, i.e. *sammā vācā sammā kammanto sammā ājīvo* - are all bound to be corrected and in conformity with our Buddhist outlook. Remember that the way to get our Corrected Vision is by listening to the Dhamma or *parato ghoso* and thereafter by reflecting on it ourselves - *yoniso ca manasikāro*. This is well and truly the correct way of becoming a real Buddhist.

Do Buddhists of Sri Lanka ever view their Ariyo Aṭṭhaṅgiko Maggo, i.e. their Religious Way of Life from this angle? Have they ever even been told to do so by their spiritual leadership in this country? We are told that some teachers of the Dhamma present the Eightfold Way like an eight-stranded rope which one has to

keep tugging, all items together, from the beginning to the end. We have yet to see it as such in the real early Buddhist texts. Others are seen telling you that it is divisible into *dāna sīla bhāvanā*. We are very much in doubt whether *dāna sīla bhāvanā* as is theoretically talked about today will get one through the Eightfold Way. We have very serious doubts.

Now that we are very much in the new century and in the forefront of the new millennium, it is time that we shake ourselves off into a new religious awakening in order to get down to a pattern of real decent human living. When I use the word 'we' here, I mean the human kind in the world as a whole, without any divisions into religious or ethnic divisions. As far as Buddhists are concerned they need to get back to the basic teachings of their early Buddhism and remodel their lives on those lines. That alone transcends the illiterate worldling who is a *lokiya puthujjana* into a tutored ariyan disciple or *sutavā ariyasāvaka* who invariably gets to his goal of Nibbāna.

Tear off the old coloured tissue paper that has been pasted all around you and in which you are wrapped up. It is already the year 2001. At least the Buddhists of this country should have greater sanity to stop speculating about NDE or Near Death Experiences. It is nearly outdated. His Holiness the Pope has already told the world a couple of years ago that Heaven is not in the region of the clouds above. We are told by people who have been on the run, going through the out-of-the-body NDE adventures that they have met their dear and near ones there.

The Buddhists must not indulge any more in this kind of bubble blowing about life after death or theorising about *antarābhava*, to give the Buddha posthumously a helping hand to scientifically establish his teachings. If one cannot understand what *bhava* means in Buddhism or accept rebirth without scientific proof, at least on the authority of the Buddha, it is best for everyone of them, monk or layman, to quit Buddhism forthwith and find their Nirvana in science and in test-tubes.

There is a very urgent and serious need today for the Buddhists, particularly those in Sri Lanka, to re-investigate their religion as a living philosophy. We must check as to how our religiousness affects life in the world in general, both of ourselves and of those besides ourselves. Religion, we believe, is the best lubricant for most of the stresses and strains that surge up in society, among men, women and children, everywhere, under various provocations, social, religious and ethnic.

I wish more people in this country knew, particularly those who need to know more about such things, that the Oxford University Press, New York, brought out in 1994, a book entitled Religion, The Missing Dimension Of Statecraft [Edited by Douglas Johnston and Cynthia Sampson]. It was first issued as an Oxford University paperback in 1995.

We strongly feel that craftiness of politics, anywhere in the world, has to be tempered with religion and religious motivation. This is the correct and wholesome use of religion in society. The world today does not need the vicious exploitative side of mass conversion and propagation of any religion. Religion propagated in this manner is an outmoded old world tool which has come down the pipe line through the ages. More so to Asian countries under colonialism. In the world today, we must have the courage to relegate that aspect of religion to the archives and the museums.

We have seen it happen and we have seen its ill effects. We do not need it in that form any more. This is where we need the support of religions to reverse the process and act and react on society differently. But do we get it adequately with honesty and sincerity? Can we not, here and now, work for the common good of man on earth, without divisive religious factionalism?

And for the Buddhists, in addition to re-discovering the basic teachings of Gotama the Buddha as recorded in our authentic early Pali texts, we should also attempt to initiate the living of Buddhism along its recommended gradual path of spiritual training. This is often referred to as *anupubba-sikkhā anupubba-kiriya*

*anupubbapaṭipadā*. The Buddhist system of liberation from saṃsāra to Nirvana must necessarily follow this gradual and definitely altruistic process. The staggering egoism in man, *sakkāya-diṭṭhi*, either of the self or of the party, religious or whatever it may be, has to be minimised and effaced. In the Buddhist goal of Nirvana, there can be none of it. Egoism as I-ness [*ahaṃkāra*] and my-ness [*mamiṃkāra*] are totally eradicated.

This is essentially a process of culture, referred to with words like *sikkhā* and *bhāvanā*. *Sikkhā* is training, nurture or culture. It is growth within a predetermined pattern, within a specific perimeter, intended to serve a specific purpose. This Buddhist spiritual culture called *sikkhā* is delivered as a carefully graduated three-fold package, involving a three-tiered ascent. At the basic ground level is development of moral goodness called *sīla*. That is the harmonious wholesome relationship of man to the world he lives in, including all life within it, man and bird and beast. *Sīla* shall guard man in terms of his word and deed as he lives in the world. Without the fulfillment of this basic requirement of wholesome adjustment to the world of humans via the medium of *sīla*, no man or woman shall aspire for any transcendental ascent. There are no supersonic intellectual leaps or time saving short cuts.

Our considered opinion is that Vipassanā which is being widely practised today, if it is going to be true to its original Buddhist meaning of final transcendental wisdom, has to take up its rightful position in the queue, verifying that *sīla* has already fulfilled its preparatory role at the commencement of the Buddhist spiritual career. In other words *sīla-bhāvanā* has necessarily to precede any underaking of mind culture. In fact *sīla* guarantees that the necessary culture at the physical level or *kāya-bhāvanā* which must necessarily precede any form of mind culture has already been accomplished.